

He could feel the floor plates could be felt shaking below foot as the squawk of warning klaxons echoed incessantly throughout the depths of the ship. The thud of military boots on metal rang out as members of the Warhost marched through the passages. As Bentre walked quickly down the hallway, he made note of the number of soldiers whom he had passed already. He could feel his heart thundering in his chest. The Force was turbulent with the emotions of the crew. Fear was thick in the air.

They should have known that this was coming. When the Collective's fleet had shown up during the attack on the Suffering the Corellian Sith had dared to believe that someone other than the Lotus or Inquisitorius cared about the ongoing conflict. It appeared by all means that this was true. It had been too good to be true to believe that they would stop at attacking the Iron Throne though. Rather than bringing hope, the attack had acted as a harbinger of doom for the Brotherhood. Raising an arm, he motioned fleeing soldiers toward the escape pods for this section of the damnation.

If he had been wise Bentre could have warned the rest of his Clan's Summit. They might have made some attempt to mitigate the damage. This latest attack had shattered any presumption that the man might have held that the Collective could be reasoned or bargained with. This attack was something that Clan Naga Sadow should have foreseen. There had been little from the Iron Throne following the attack on the Suffering.

"Are you lost?" The gruff voice of a man pulled the Shadow from his own thoughts. As he turned, Bentre saw a Mirilian, dressed in a sharp Warhost Uniform, hefting a DC-17m blaster. The soldier looked over the Sadowan before giving a nod. "The escape pods are down the hallway. If you follow the red lines they will lead you to section Aurek fifteen. The escape pods are near there."

Stahoes smiled in spite of himself and shook his head. "I can't head to the escape pods just yet. There are still people on board. The *Damnation* doesn't have that much time left. Besides, the Consul is still on the bridge. So unless you want to join me-" Bentre glanced at the soldier's rank insignia, "-Commander, then I suggest you get to the escape pods yourself."

"Are the comms down? Wouldn't it be easier to check with your man?"

The Sith shook his head. "Left my comm with Sanguinius. Makes it a little harder. I am better off hoofing it."

The soldier took his right hand from his weapon to dig in his pocket. He raised the hand to reveal a commlink. It was worn but appeared functional. "This should work, shouldn't it?"

"Thanks Commander-" The Shadow's words trailed off as he realized he didn't know the man's name.

“Telum, sir. Just doing my job. If we both make it off this ship alive you can bring it back to me on Sepros sometime.” The alien gave a warm smile before saluting smartly. “Keep yourself safe.”

Bentre gave a brief nod. It took just a moment to set the frequency before he could compress the transmit and start talking. “Sang, this is Bentre. Are you still alright? The evacuations have been going as smoothly as we could hope for. It looks like we have a couple of compromised decks but we have been keeping order. What is the status on the bridge?” He drew a deep breath, realizing that he had gotten so excited that he was unsure if he had reached the Sadowan leader. “Sang, are you there? Is everything okay?”

The commlink buzzed with interference. It drowned out other sound for a moment before the device focused in on the signal. “-well on the bridge. Evacuation underw-” More static filled the channel briefly. “-our location.”

“Repeat?”

“What is your location, Bentre?”

The Corellian shook his head. “I am near Aurek 15. If you can meet me there, we can get you on one of the pods. I still need to get people off the *Damnation* while we have a chance.”

Silence met these words. Then, a shouting could be heard in the background. The Corellian struggled to make out the words but to no avail. Then he heard clearly two words which made his stomach sink: “incoming ship”. Then there was a cacophany of sound before the channel went dead.

“No!” Bentre growled as he set off into a run. The suicide attacks had been bad enough. The loss of the Clan flagship was terrible enough. He was not going to let the Collective take their Consul as well.

Hallways and passageways flew by in what seemed like minutes. All of time seemed to run together as Bentre Stahoes ran towards the bridge section. The lifts would be out but there was a service opening he could still use to get into the bridge proper. Hopefully the attacks hadn’t collapsed it.

The next minutes were torturous. It felt as though every moment were an eternity. The sound of klaxxons, the shaking of the ship as additional impacts rocked the Venator and his own ragged breaths sounded as though they were coming from miles away. Adrenaline kept him moving despite protesting muscles and the scream of his lungs as he struggled for each breath. His eyes stung as he thought about losing Sanguinius to the likes of the Collective. Every errant thought that crossed his mind in that stretch, despite their inherent poison, drove him forward all the harder.

As he came to the service passage, Bentre threw himself up onto the rungs and ascended their height with hardly a thought. His hands moved more quickly than he imagined possible. He felt no strain or struggle as he pushed himself up with both arms and legs in unison. As he approached the top he saw the grate which marked the exit to the bridge. The smell of smoke met his nose. Holding up his hand to the grate, Stahoes pushed out in the Force to dislodge the blockage.

His eyes came to rest on the still form of his friend. A tug had crashed through into the command deck and the entire compartment was ablaze. The backup systems were still in place, but at the rate that things were going the back up systems would likely fail too.

It just seemed as though nothing had gone right since the new threat had appeared. Pravus had withdrawn what little support he had offered before. For the first time, the withdrawal of support by the Iron Throne truly hit Bentre Stahoes. The worm of a Grand Master had left them all to burn, just as Sanguinius had almost done. Running to the Consul, the Sith began to push debris aside in an attempt to free the Entar.

“Come *on*, Sang. Don’t do this to me, buddy. We gotta get our asses out of here. The ship is going down and we’re all in deep poodoo.” Sanguinius stirred briefly, but judging from the gash on his head, it didn’t look like the man was going to be getting off the bridge of his own strength. Bending down over the prostrate form of his superior, Bentre grasped at the Gray Jedi’s limbs. With a grunt, Stahoes threw the man over his shoulder. Looking at the destruction around him, the Corellian gave a sigh. ‘Well, let’s just hope the Force is on our side today, Sang by friend. Otherwise, this might be our last hurrah.’”